Press Conference Statement by Bangladeshi Trans Activist, Sahara Chowdhury
Date: Friday, August 22, 2025
Location: Sagor-Runi Auditorium at Dhaka Reporters Unity in Dhaka, Bangladesh

My name is Sahara Chowdhury. I am a trans woman. During the July Uprising, I fought against the despotic Awami regime. As did many LGBT people throughout Bangladesh, such as Priya Khan and Muntasir Rahman, the discriminatory removal of whom from the NCP political party was contributed to by the online doxxing (bullying) done to him by Sorowar. There is a gay man who had been shot during the protest whose case is still in the International Crime Tribunal. Despite the contribution of queer people in the July uprising, people like Mahtab and Sorowar publicly spoke against the government website for even giving the option to register transgender martyrs of the July movement—claiming our dead are unsuitable to share the "holy list" of other cisgender martyrs.

To deny potential transgender martyrs of the July genocide the option to be documented is an act of genocide denial. I sought to combat their genocide denial as best as I could. It is in fact quite ridiculous and silly that Sorowar and Mahtab, after committing genocide denial and an active attempt at impeding documentation process regarding July martyrs based on identity politics, after doxxing LGBT people in the country again and again, are choosing to act like internet drawings and memes are the most grievous act of harm done to their personage. I merely whispered in the language they're the grammarians of. It is quite ironic that Sorowar, in a press briefing, wondered, after blaming LGBT people for Western imperialism for years, why he was being blamed for the burning of hijra pollis. I have chosen to file a GD in response to their exaggeration of the situation and attempts to instigate mobs.

On 13th August, I was expelled from my university due to posting satirical and polemic cartoons depicting these two public figures, who have previously doxxed (bullied) a transgender worker at Walton simply for being trans. The university did not follow proper due process, did not give me a disciplinary hearing, I was notified of my expulsion through the public notice put out by them, and far as I understand it, the university was acting unconstitutionally in expelling me "for life".

For years, I have faced harassment, rumors, and threats that have more basis in reality than satirical cartoons. When I first came to the university, I was closeted and used the male restroom. After I came out as a trans woman, faculty told me to use the female restroom. Later, the then-VC and then-Registrar said I should use a teacher's restroom instead. I asked again if I could use the female restroom, and they gave me permission for it. But false accusations sprang up online claiming I used both male and female restrooms whenever I wanted. The truth is, I simply did not drink water during the day to avoid using any restrooms at all. However, the false accusation continued to spread. This was just one part of a bigger smear campaign. Because I was a top student, certain classmates spread rumors that, because I am a trans woman, Western organizations were paying teachers to unethically raise my grades. Even the success of trans people is used against them.

In Bangladesh, LGBT activists have been murdered. I have received countless death and rape threats myself. To show I would not hide, I described my daily routine for when I am outside in my social media profile pictures. It was my way of saying, "If you want to attack me, you know where to find me", that I am not afraid of bigots.

After July, in an unofficial student group chat, the students mocked the death of a trans woman named Shila and shared videos of trans women being stabbed. When I spoke against it, they sent me threats of physical violence. I reminded them that my profile picture already shows when I am outside. If they

wanted to hurt me, they could find me. They claimed this was me threatening them. I was accused of terrorism, of threatening students, and of endangering others by posting a so-called university bus schedule. In reality, I had only mentioned the time I usually wait near the Tilagor over-bridge for transport. The campus is in Pirabazar. I never said it was the university bus, and I often take a public bus instead.

On August 11, I posted satirical drawings of Mohammad Sarwar Hossain and Asif Mahtab Utsho, two men who have openly opposed trans rights. These cartoons were expressions of anger from someone who is and whose community is always under attack. My work was satirical and polemic.
Even a few days prior, the intersex individual Porimoni's shop was vandalized by a mob. That's real terrorism, that's real violence, not satirical cartoons.

If my writings are called terrorism, then even Fanon’s Wretched of the Earth would be called terrorism. My works are a symbol of resistance against those genocide deniers who are against our civil rights. When in Western countries LGBT people have rights and non-Western countries’ LGBT population demands rights, then we are told, “LGBTs are Western culture,” and when the West takes away the rights of their LGBT communities, we are told, “Even the West doesn't have LGBT rights, how can it be in Bangladesh?” It is their thought process that is centered around the Western ruling class, not my thought process. Free, free Palestine. Death to America. Death to Israel.

The Western ruling class used to segregate black and white people 60 years ago, and enslaved them 200 years ago. Black people earned their rights through struggle and blood. So would any dumbass claim black civil rights is “western hegemony”? So the LGBT rights for which Harvey Milk was murdered, Marsha Johnson and Sylvie Rivera gave their lives for — why is it called western hegemony?

Western right-wingers call our rights “cultural marxism,” and certain intellectuals in our country call our rights “ western hegemony”— that's the extent of their cultural hegemony. Gramsci had mentioned hegemony in relation to the ruling class, as I care not for Western hegemony — neither do I respect Bengali feudalistic theocratic hegemony. Some even call our marriage rights “heteronormative”, which is like calling black people's rights to vote “whitero-normative”.

When we speak of queer rights, we are not speaking of luxuries. We are not demanding ornaments of freedom, but the very tools of survival. In Bangladesh—and across much of the world—survival is structured around the family, and the family is legally structured through marriage. Marriage is not just about love; it is about access to networks, to inheritance, to housing, to jobs, to stability itself. Without the security of marriage rights, parents refuse to provide education or resources. Without education, queer youth are shut out of jobs. Without jobs, they are funneled into ghettos, into begging, into prostitution—not because of who they are, but because the state and society have engineered their lives to collapse.

Legal frameworks that recognize civil unions and chosen families would not only provide essential protections—allowing partners to rent homes, share resources, and make medical decisions—but would also give families a tangible incentive to nurture and support their queer children. Legal self-identification would allow individuals the right to exist safely and be recognized in society. The denial of these basic rights, including healthcare and a proper funeral, is a slow and systemic process of erasing an entire community from society.

This systemic violence is deeply rooted in colonial-era legislation and other discriminatory laws that criminalized marginalized LGBTQ people, slandering consensual sexual acts between adult people as

“unnatural acts or nuisances.” We reject these laws because they are a deliberate attempt to erase our existence and control our lives. This same legal apparatus is seen in the use of the Special Powers Act (SPA) to ostracize and arrest Bawm civilians in Bangladesh. It had also been used during the fallen despotic party, the Awami League's era, to crack down on opposing political parties. The use of such legal instruments to target and harm marginalized communities proves that these laws are not about justice but about control and oppression.

When a marginalized community is deliberately stripped of these fundamental rights and further threatened with criminalization, resistance is not a choice—it is a condition of existence. To ask for civil rights is not to ask for indulgence; it is to demand the oxygen mask in a world engineered to suffocate us. The lack of these rights is killing us. Our resistance is our only answer.

I want to be reinstated at my university. I seek reparations for the unconstitutional manner in which they expelled me. I also demand equal standards of expression. The majority cannot enjoy the freedom to criticize, satirize, and protest, while minorities are punished for doing the same.

And lastly,
The demand is simple and non-negotiable: give us what you already have.
The right to life.
The right to property.
The right to education.
The right to safety.
The right to self-determination.
The bare minimum.
Anything less is a declaration of systemic violence.

#letsaharastudy #legalisequeermarriage #AbolishSection377 #queerrightsarehumanrights